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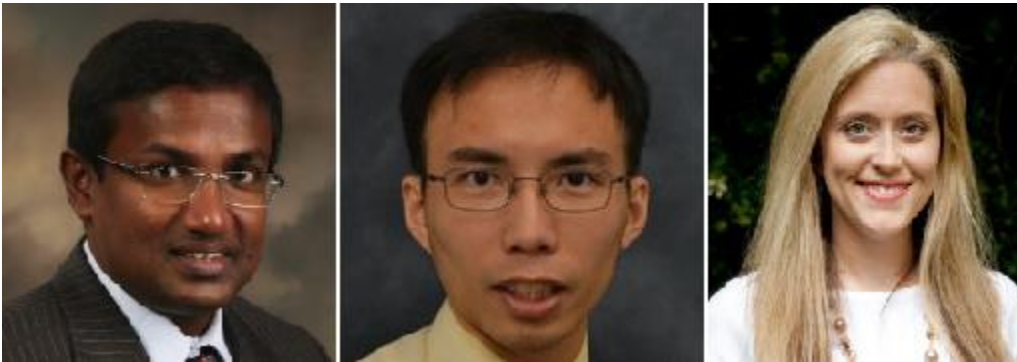
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Georgia Southern faculty experts: turn your COVID-19 panic into a plan

March 27, 2020



From left, Atin Adhikari, Ph.D., Isaac Chun-Hai Fung, Ph.D., and Jessica Schwind, Ph.D.

As concerns arise about the novel COVID-19 virus, faculty public health experts at Georgia Southern are advising people to take their panic into an action plan which follows guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Worry is a valid response to stressful situations, but for the public, turn your worry into productive action,” said Jessica Schwind, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Biostatistics, Epidemiology and Environmental Health Sciences. “Talk with your family about emergencies most likely to happen and prepare your household, including stocking up on food and supplies should you need to stay at home. However, these are standard recommendations for general emergency preparedness and should not induce panic-buying or hoarding.”

CDC guidelines regarding the virus include washing your hands frequently; avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth; staying home when you are sick; covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in the trash (if you have no tissue then cover your face with your entire elbow); cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Georgia Southern faculty experts, Schwind, Atin Adhikari, Ph.D. and Isaac Chun-Hai Fung, Ph.D., are all professors in the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, and provide a wealth of experience in dealing with similar situations as the COVID-19 pandemic. They say these CDC guidelines are the baseline for dealing with the virus, and offer other helpful ways to stem its spread.

Adhikari, an associate professor of environmental health sciences, brings more than 15 years of extensive research experience on aerosols, airborne microorganisms, other air pollutants and related respiratory disorders. He says the best way to combat such a virus is prevention. Social distancing as much as possible will limit the spread of the disease, and if it becomes mandatory, people should adhere to the rule.

“People should stay calm and quiet and help the public health officers in the event of a mandated quarantine,” he said. “This procedure is important because you may have been unknowingly exposed to the virus from infected persons who are not showing symptoms yet.”

Fung, a digital health expert and infectious disease epidemiologist, has worked with CDC emergency response modeling taskforce in response to the avian flu in China in 2013, and has extensive experience with epidemic

data. He says even in the event of a quarantine, people should practice preventative measures daily, including cleaning surfaces and disinfecting communal areas every day. He said one can't be too cautious and shouldn't take easily avoidable risks.

"At the exponential growing phase of an outbreak, the number of confirmed cases lag behind the number of infected individuals," he said. "Therefore, simply making a low-risk judgement based on the number of confirmed cases may give people a false sense of assurance that there is no community transmission going on. The absence of evidence is not the evidence of its absence."

At such a stressful time, when news from around the world can bring fear and panic almost instantly, Schwind says not to neglect the mental stressors of the virus during this time.

"The emotional impact of a public health emergency can cause distress, especially among first-responders, people with preexisting health conditions and children," she said. "I encourage people to take breaks from the news, go for walks, and connect with others through phone, email, text or video calls when possible. However, they should contact their healthcare provider if stress reactions become severe or interfere with their daily lives."

For updates on Georgia Southern and COVID-19, follow Georgia Southern on Twitter and Facebook. Visit the CDC website, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>, for more updates on the virus.

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